



**Morning Alert - Thursday, February 23, 2017**

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## **HEADLINES**

### **Morning news**

Most networks continued to carry follow-up reports on the murder of Kim Jong Nam in Malaysia, saying that Malaysian police have announced that they plan to question a second secretary of the North Korean Embassy, a North Korean airline employee, and another North Korean national. NTV led with a report on an announcement by NASA that it has discovered a solar system with seven Earth-like planets.

All national dailies except Nikkei gave top play to reports on the alleged involvement of an official of the North Korean Embassy in Malaysia in the murder of Kim Jong Nam. Nikkei led with a report on a request from the Yamato Transport workers' union to reduce deliveries because surging demand and a staff shortage are straining the workforce.

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **Yachi to visit U.S. for consultation with new National Security Advisor McMaster**

Asahi reported on a telephone conversation on Wednesday between National Security Advisor McMaster and Secretary General Yachi of the National Security Council Secretariat, during which the two officials agreed that Yachi will visit the U.S. at an early date to hold direct talks with his U.S. counterpart. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga commented on the call by saying that the two officials agreed to work together closely to steadily follow through with what was agreed upon at the recent U.S.-Japan summit meeting.

### **Abe tells abductees' kin he will work with U.S. to resolve abductions**

Asahi and Nikkei wrote that Prime Minister Abe on Wednesday told a group of family members of Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea that he will make utmost efforts to bring their loved ones home as soon as possible. Referring to his recent meeting with President Trump, Abe told the families that he and the President were in complete agreement on the importance of resolving the abduction issue. Asahi interpreted this remark to mean that the premier plans to work with the U.S. on the abduction issue.

### **Senior GOJ official attends “Takeshima Day” ceremony**

Yomiuri and Nikkei wrote that Parliamentary Vice-Minister of the Cabinet Office Mutai attended a ceremony organized by the prefectural government in Matsue, Shimane, on Feb. 22 to commemorate “Takeshima Day.” Mutai stated at the ceremony that Takeshima clearly belongs to Japan, both in historical terms and under international law. This is the fifth year in a row for the Japanese government to send a senior official to the event. The South Korean Foreign Ministry summoned the Japanese Embassy’s Minister-Counselor Suzuki on Wednesday to lodge a protest over Tokyo’s dispatch of the senior government representative to the annual ceremony.

### **Russian military plans to deploy division to Northern Territories**

Asahi wrote that Russian Defense Minister Shoigu announced on Wednesday a plan to deploy a military division to the Kuril Islands, including the Northern Territories, by the end of 2017. Shoigu told the Russian parliament that the military plans to complete beefing up the Kurils’ defenses by the end of this year by deploying the division. The paper wrote that the announcement verified Russia’s long-term plan to establish military bases on the Kuril Islands, noting that Russia deployed land-to-air missiles on Etorofu and Kunashiri islands, which are part of the Northern Territories, last year. Japanese Ambassador to Moscow Kozuki told a press conference on Wednesday that Russia’s military deployment to the Northern Territories runs counter to Japan’s position. Yomiuri and Sankei ran similar stories.

## **ECONOMY**

### **Abe, Trudeau speak by phone on TPP**

Asahi wrote that Prime Minister Abe and his Canadian counterpart Trudeau spoke by phone on Wednesday and agreed to closely coordinate with the other TPP member states. According to a GOJ source, Abe told Trudeau that he and President Trump agreed to strengthen bilateral and regional economic relations based on free and fair trade rules. Other papers ran similar reports.

### **Japan to send senior officials to TPP meeting in Chile**

Mainichi wrote that the GOJ decided on Wednesday to dispatch three senior parliamentary officials at the Foreign Ministry to a meeting to be held in Chile on March 15 to discuss the future of the TPP. The planned participation of the three senior officials is intended to pursue the possibility of the United States returning to the TPP in the future by demonstrating Japan’s position of attaching

importance to the multilateral trade framework. The paper speculated that the participants will not rule out the idea of establishing a new framework with the participation of 11 of the 12 TPP members, excluding the U.S.

### **Amari recommends strategic dialogue rather than FTA talks between U.S. and Japan**

Yomiuri wrote that former TPP Minister Amari commented on the possibility of a U.S.-Japan FTA during a speech he gave in Tokyo on Wednesday by saying: "There is no merit in leaders butting heads over autos or other individual items. It is necessary for the U.S. and Japan to hold a strategic dialogue rather than bilateral FTA talks." Concerning the TPP, Amari stressed the significance of the regional trade framework by saying it was a major experiment in which the U.S. and Japan set global standards by establishing rules for investment and trade. He added that Japan does not need to act hastily and should support the other TPP members' domestic procedures to prepare for Washington's possible return to the TPP.

### **GOJ to study investment in U.S. oil business**

Asahi wrote that the GOJ will seriously consider Japan's investment in the energy business in the U.S. following the start of the Trump administration. According to the paper, MOFA will include the expansion of crude oil imports from the U.S. in its foreign policy strategy in response to the two executive orders on pipelines issued by President Trump. The paper speculated that Japanese companies' investment in the U.S. oil business will be discussed at the new U.S.-Japan economic dialogue.

### **Nuclear regulator confirms safety of two reactors at Fukui plant**

All Wednesday evening papers wrote that the Nuclear Regulation Authority agreed on Wednesday that Reactors No. 3 and 4 at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture are in compliance with its safety standards adopted after the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011. The nuclear regulator will give its official approval after soliciting public opinions for 30 days. The operator of the plant will take disaster-prevention measures by May or later and probably will be able to restart operations at the reactors in the summer or later. The number of reactors that comply with the standards has now reached 12 at six power stations.